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ABSTRACT

Two studies explored characteristics of the Franco-American and nonFranco-American learning disabled college student. The first study involving 200 learning disabled college students had four objectives--explore the appropriateness of a self referral model to identify the college learning disabled student, explore the predominant characteristics of the self referred learning disabled undergraduate student, examine the degree to which existing programs at a university can meet the learning needs of these students, and determine the degree of need for additional remedial programs to deal with learning disabled college students. Among findings were that students' major weaknesses occurred in such areas as visual memory, deductive reasoning, and reading comprehension. A second study involving 10 Franco-American college students examined student characteristics, perceived academic problems, perceived social/emotional well being, and perceived family characteristics and relationships. Students were evaluated, informed of their strengths and weaknesses, counseled, and tutored. Results indicated that the characteristics of the Franco-American learning disabled student are very similar to the characteristics of the nonFranco-American learning disabled student: all 10 Franco-Americans perceived continuous antagonism, hostility, frustration, and/or indifference on the part of their university instructors to themselves as Franco-Americans: and all 10 Franco-Americans were under observable stressful conditions during a majority of their evaluation sessions. (SB)

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The Canadian Franco-American Learning Disabled College Student at the University of Maine at Orono

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Part I

The Non-Franco-American Learning Disabled Student

Background

Learning Disabilities as an area of specialization began less than two decades ago. The Division of Children with Learning Disabilities of the Council for Exceptional Children adopted the following definition:

> Persons with special learning disabilities exhibit a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written languages. These may be manifested in disorders of listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling or arithmetic. They include conditions which have been referred to as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, developmental aphasia, etc. They do not include learning problems which are due primarily to visual, hearing or motor handicaps, to mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or to environmental disadvantage.

While there is growing agreement on the definition of the learning disabled there remains considerable controversy over appropriate identification procedures. Most of the work in this regard has focused on the young (Anderson 1970; Schloss 1971). Results of a few experimental studies have helped delineate specific characteristics of the adolescent learning disabled student (Deshler 1974; 1975). While attempts have been made to determine the incidence in general, there have been no known studies undertaken specifically at the secondary level (Mann, Goodman, Weiderholt 1978). In addition, there are no known studies on either the characteristics or the incidence level of the secondary/post-secondary Franco-American learning disabled student.

During the initial phase (1975-80) of this research at the University of Maine at Orono (UMO), this investigator explored the characteristics of that University's non-Franco-American learning disabled population. Concurrently, the capacity of that institution to effectively educate this group of students was explored.

Objectives

1. To explore the appropriateness of a self-referral model to identify the college learning disabled student.
2. To explore the predominant characteristics of the self-referred learning disabled undergraduate students.
3. To examine the degree to which existing programs at a university can meet the learning needs of these students.
4. To determine the degree of need for additional remedial programs to deal with the learning disabled college students.

The University has a full-time undergraduate enrollment of roughly 10,000 students. From January of 1976 to December of 1980 over two hundren students sought and received services in varying degrees in an unofficial, non-advertised self-referral program for learning disabled students. Three significant conclusions (i.e., for the purposes of this study) were:

1) Most faculty are unaware of the student with learning disabilities.
2) An informal self-referral system appears to generate the "hardworking" - "I want to learn" bright learning disabled students.

3) Learning disabled students are under a considerable degree of stress.

The major weaknesses of these students as a group are in the following categories: visual memory, deductive reasoning, reading comprehension, written expression, spelling, sequencing, cause and effect relationships, study skills and feelings of self-worth. The major strengths of these students as a group are in the following areas: coping skills, auditory memory, social awareness perception, willingness to learn, and, perhaps surprisingly, better than average grade point averages.

Part II

The Frank-American Learning Disabled College Student

Background

During the Summer of 1978 the University of Maine at Orono received a grant by the National Endowment for the Humanities. This investigator's proposal entitled "An Investigation of the Perceived Learning Problems of the Franco-American Student at UMO" and subsequent case studies are an out growth of this grant.

It is necessary to share with the reader at this time pertinent statistics of Maine's Franco-American population before exploring the characteristics of UMO's Franco-American Learning Disabled Students.

Franco-Americans make up approximately 35% of the state of Maine's population. "In 1974, 63 of the 85 dropouts in the Biddeford, Maine schools where French speakers make up 61.4% of the population (1970 Census), were Franco-Americans. In Lewiston, Maine's (1970 Census, 59.9% French speaking) public schools, 33% of the Franco-American students never complete their schooling. In addition, 98% of the general, non-college track is made up of Franco-Americans although only 68% of the school population is Franco-American." A report prepared for the Maine Department of Educational and Cultural Services concludes that:

> "Children from families who speak some other language besides English in the home are fairly consistent in performing below the children of parents who speak only English. These differences should not be interpreted as meaning that bilingual homes have

> detrimental effects on the children's performance. A more likely interpretation relates to the fact that many bilingual homes are also more likely to have less reading material available and have parents at lower educational and occupational levels."

In November of 1973, then Congressman now Senator William S. Cohen of Maine, stated in the House of Representatives:

> "In my state...in one area surveyed, where the concentration of pupils who speak French is 96%, only 2% ever enter college. In the state as a whole, 51% go to college."

The UMO campus shows (1979-80) a 7-8% Franco-American enrollment in a state where the Franco-American population is estimated at between 30 and 40%.*

From 1978 to present, the total self-referred Franco-American learning disabled population (N = 10) was studied as a subpopulation of the two hundred self-referred non-Franco-American learning disabled population at UMO.

For the purposes of this investigation, Franco-American means: (1) self-recognition as Franco-American, (2) having a French surname, (3) having one parent who converses in French in the home.

Objectives

1. To explore the predominant characteristics of the Franco-American self-referred learning disabled undergraduate students at UMO.

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* Thankful acknowledgement is given to Raymond Pelletier, Director of Canadian Franco-American Project for the State of Maine and UMO Franco-American data.

2. To explore the perceived academic problems of the Franco-American learning disabled student at UMO.
3. To explore the perceived social/emotional well being of the Franco-American learning disabled student at UMO.
4. To explore the perceived family characteristics and relationships of the Franco-American learning disabled student.

Procedure

An informal self-referral system was initiated during Spring, 1976 semester. Briefly this process consists of talking to various groups and departments on campus about the characteristics of the adult with learning disabilities. It was and continues to be stated as this investigators area of research interest. The student is evaluated, informed of his strengths and weaknesses, counseled, and tutored. The evaluation process is a minimum of ten one hour sessions. The final evaluation session is an analysis of all the formal and informal data gleaned from the evaluation tools and the interviews themselves. At this stage, the student may:

(1) accept the evaluation and recommendations;
(2) reject the evaluation and recommendations;
(3) accept and follow the evaluation and recommendations;
(4) remain in contact with the investigator for such purposes as a friendly chat, sounding board and/or escape valve.

From September, 1978 to December, 1980, each Franco-American learning disabled student (N = 10) initiated a minimum of thirty

contacts and a maximum of sixty-eight contacts with the investigator. This was in addition to the evaluation sessions.

Results

1. The characteristics of the Franco-American learning disabled student are very similar to the characteristics of the non-Franco-American learning disabled student previously described in this paper. However, there are two differences which are more of degree than of type: (1) The range of the reading comprehension scores of the Franco-Americans is 2.5 to 3.5 grade equivalency while the range of scores for the non-Franco-American learning disabled group is 3.5 to 5.5. (2) The grade point average (GPA) of the Franco-Americans is 3.0 to 3.6 (4.0 system) while that of the non-Franco-American learning disabled group is 2.5 to 3.7.
2. All ten Franco-Americans expressed perceived continuous antagonism, hostility, frustration and/or indifference on the part of their university instructors to themselves as Franco-Americans.
3. All ten Franco-Americans were under observable stressful conditions during a majority of their sessions. Stress was recorded by observed physical mannerisms (i.e., tics, red eyes, bleeding fingernails, etc.), general physical health (i.e., long-term colds, long-term coughs, etc.), and topic focus of the students conversations.
4. Each Franco-American (N = 10):
   a. is the first in entire family to receive a college education.

b. is financially supporting himself through the university.

c. is in an expressed negative-hostile relationship with either one or both parents.

d. is not bilingual.

e. is not emotionally supported by family.

f. is no longer living at home (i.e., vacations).

Discussion

The case study format and the non-structured interview was used to collect data on ten Franco-American learning disabled students. The project took place at the University of Maine at Orono from 1978 to 1980. While the sample of students is small, the number of time each student was in contact with the investigator is large. The large number of sessions seem to give some consistencies across the group. Generalizations should not be made from this project. However, this project does raise issues which should be investigated with larger numbers of Franco-American learning disabled students. Some questions raised which seem to be worthy of further research:

1.) What are the factors which encourage some Franco-Americans from non-formally educated families to pursue a college education?

2.) What are the personality, educational, and intellectual factors of Franco-American college students with lower than 3.0 G.E. in reading comprehension who academically succeed in a university setting?

3.) What are the characteristics, teaching style and perceptions of non-Franco-American college instructors towards Franco-American students enrolled in their classes?

4.) What can be done to alleviate stress of the non-majority (in this case, learning disabled) college student?

5.) What happens to academically successful Franco-American learning disabled college students after graduation, on the job, social-relationships, etc.?

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